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ABSTRACT

This paper on the supply of minority teachers in the United States is drawn from a report of the Florida Education Standards Commission titled "Minority Teachers for Florida's Classrooms: Meeting the Challenge." The paper cites the underrepresentation of minority groups among the nation's teachers and the trend toward increasing underrepresentation. Declines are reported in the number of bachelor's degrees in education awarded to minority students and the number of teacher education majors from ethnic groups. Teacher certification examinations are cited as the greatest single barrier to the entrance of minorities to the teaching profession. Reasons for low black representation in teacher education programs include the lower percentage of black high-school graduates who attend college, the higher standards of college admission which exist today, and minority students' lack of academic background and preparation for college. A list of 13 references is included. Appended is a separate single-page fact sheet containing statistical data extracted from a National Center for Education Statistics publication, "Background and Experience Characteristics of Public and Private School Teachers," for 1984-85 and 1985-86, respectively. (JDD)

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The Supply of Minority Teachers in the United States

Percentages of Minority Teachers in the Work Force

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The Supply of Minority Teachers in the United States

In April 1987, the Florida Education Standards Commission delivered a report called Minority Teachers for Florida's Classrooms: Meeting the Challenge, to the Governor, State Board of Education, and the Florida Legislature. One section of this report is a summary concerning the supply of minority teachers across the United States, which forms the content of this paper. For further information on the report contact the Florida Education Standards Commission, c/o Florida Department of Education, Tallahassee, Florida 32399.

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In 1980, 12.5 percent of the U.S. teaching force in public elementary and secondary schools were members of a minority group. Since minorities comprised 21.3 percent of the national population, they were clearly under-represented among employed teachers. All trends indicate that, rather than growing in representation, minority teachers, especially blacks, are diminishing in number and as a proportion of all public school teachers. Indeed, projections are that, unless interventions reverse the trend, by 1990 the teaching force will be barely 5 percent minority, while fully one-third of the students in public schools will be minority children.

Although the causes are many and complex, probably the greatest single barrier to the entrance of minorities to the teaching profession are teacher certification examinations. Most states are now testing prospective teachers. In many states, a majority of black examinees are failing, compared to white failure rates in the 10-20 percent range (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1986; Rodman, 1985). From 1980 to 1984, in the southern states using teacher certification tests, the number of black teachers had dropped by 6.4 percent at the same time that the total number of teachers had increased. Bernard Gifford, Dean of the College of Education at the University of California in Los Angeles, warned against the "echo effect" of high minority failure rates on teacher certification tests. He contended that, when minority students realized their group members were not passing the tests, they would no longer choose to prepare for teaching careers (Gifford, 1985). Dr. Gifford's proposition is borne out by the decline in the number of bachelor's degrees in education awarded to blacks.

Historically, the predominantly black colleges have been the largest producers of black teachers. In 1974, these colleges awarded 9,051 bachelor's degrees in education. By 1981, this number had dwindled by 44 percent to barely 4,000 (Witty, 1984). In 1976, of all bachelor's degrees awarded to blacks, 9.2 percent were in education. In 1983, only 6.9 percent of the bachelor's degrees awarded to blacks were in education. For Hispanics there was an increase in the proportion of education degree awards from 1.8 to 2.6 percent of all Hispanic bachelor's degrees, but this represented a decrease in the actual number of prospective Hispanic teachers (Rodman, 1985).

Obviously, minorities are not choosing teaching careers for many of the same reasons their white counterparts are not: more attractive career options, once closed to them, are now available. In a longitudinal study of black land-grant colleges, Lyson (1983) found these institutions, once primarily teachers' colleges, had successfully diversified their curricula to meet the demand for blacks trained in business, engineering, and the social sciences. In the ten-year period between 1967 and 1977, degree awards grew by 30 percent in these fields. Concurrently, there was a tremendous decline in the number of students obtaining education degrees. This phenomenon, which occurred in predominantly white institutions as well, was also caused by teacher salaries that were not competitive with other jobs, teaching's low status and image, and working conditions that were perceived as unprofessional.

Reductions in the number of teacher education majors of all ethnic groups and the high failure rates of minorities on certification exams will most certainly result in fewer minority teachers. A third recent trend impacting the supply of minority teachers is a reduction in college enrollment among blacks. Although minorities are 21.3 percent of the total U.S. population, they comprise only 17 percent of the enrollment in higher education (American Council on Education, 1986). Blacks, 13 percent of 18-24 year olds, were only 9.6 percent of college students in 1983. Hispanic students were 4.4 percent of the college enrollees and 7.1 percent of 18-24 yard olds. Notwithstanding this under-representation, Hispanic, Asian, and other minorities have made gains both in enrollment and degrees earned over the past decade. In contrast, the proportion of black enrollment has decreased at both the undergraduate and graduate levels since 1979, and fewer blacks received bachelor's degrees in 1984 than in 1978.

One reason blacks lost representation in colleges is that a lower percentage of black high school graduates now attend college. In 1976, 35.5 percent of black high school graduates attended college. In 1983, this had dropped to 27 percent. For Hispanics, the college attendance rate was 35.8 percent in 1976, declining to 31 percent in 1983. The college enrollment rate for whites increased over the same period (Marks, 1985; Rodman, 1985).

Once in college, minority students' retention rates are lower than white students'. Whereas 50 percent of white undergraduate students graduate, only 42 percent of the black and 31 percent of the Hispanic students do (Brown, 1985). The American Council on Education's Fifth Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education concluded "without question, blacks are losing ground at most levels in higher education" (p. 5). The reasons for the diminished black presence on college campuses include recent changes in financial aid, increased standards for admission to college, and inadequate academic preparation for college.

Research indicates that the type and amount of financial aid currently available to attend college have adversely affected the number of black recipients. In recent years, the federal government has shifted aid programs from the grant-type to loans, which are less desirable to low-income families. As a result, there are fewer college students from economically disadvantaged families. Enrollment of college students from families earning less than $10,000 a year was reduced by more than 30 percent in the four years from 1978 to 1982. In 1979, 45 percent of the college freshmen came from families with incomes below the national median, which was $19,661; in 1985, only 32 percent of freshmen came from families with incomes below the national median of $25,000 (Astin, 1986).

A second factor in lower black college attendance is the higher standards of admission to college. Surveys indicate a majority of institutions of higher education have raised entrance requirements and fewer of them grant exceptions. Frequently, nationally standardized tests are used as one of the criteria for admission; minorities traditionally have scored lower than whites on these examinations. In 1986, the performance of minority students on the ACT improved slightly, but still trailed 5 or more points behind that of white students (Olson, 1986). The College Board reported a "disturbing" 1986 decrease in the number of black test takers. Typically, 8 to 10 percent of the students taking the SAT or ACT have been black. Many minority leaders decry the widespread lack of support systems to assist minority students in meeting the higher standards. Elaine Witty, Dean of Education at Norfolk State University, noted that the forceful momentum to raise standards is insensitive to blacks and exacts a high "psychic" cost in diminished self-concept when they are excluded from educational opportunity (Witty, 1984).

The third factor frequently cited in the literature as a cause for lower college enrollment and success for minority groups is lack of academic background and preparation for college. This problem has several aspects. To begin with, high school graduation rates for minority students are lower than for white students. While 64.3 percent of whites complete high school, only 50.9 percent of blacks and 40.5 percent of Hispanic students graduate. Over time, the high school graduation rate for blacks has shown dramatic improvement, although it is somewhat lower recently for white and Hispanic students.

In an examination of high school curriculum, it was learned that black students are more likely to be enrolled in special education and vocational education classes than white students. Furthermore, they are under-represented in programs for the gifted and in academic classes. Even among college-bound high school seniors, black students had fewer years of course work in the academic subject areas, especially at the more advanced levels (Darling-Hammond, 1986).

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) cited the three most important factors in the decision to attend college: academic preparation, academic performance, and parental education. By virtue of high school academic preparation, it follows that black students are less likely to meet the higher criteria for college admission and less well prepared to make high scores on the entrance examinations. On the second factor, disparate academic achievement between minority and white students manifests itself all along the educational system. Carl Holman, President of the National Urban Coalition, noted that ". . . the learning gap widens in every year after kindergarten" (1986). In a comparison of student achievement in eight southern states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), black 11th graders' reading skills were comparable to those of white 7th graders (Southern Regional Education Board, 1986). On the third factor, parental education, minority students also are disadvantaged. NAEP recently reported a serious gap between the literacy levels of white and minority adults. Reinforcing the cyclical nature of educational achievement, NAEP also reported a strong relationship between the adults' literacy skills and their parents' educational level (Olsen, 1986).

Beginning in public elementary and secondary schools and continuing through college, educational outcomes for minority and non-minority students are intolerably different. This racial inequity in educational achievement is ultimately the reason why there will not be enough minority teachers. In the midst of a

general teacher shortage predicted for the future, there promises to be a severe shortage of black teachers. At present, it is estimated that no more than 3 to 5 percent of the newly trained teachers in the United States are black. Unless the trends of lower black college enrollment and high failure rates on certification tests are reversed, the gap between the number of minority teachers and students will grow wider and wider.

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Percentages of Minority Teachers in the Work Force

The following data are from the National Center for Education Statistics' Public School Survey 1984-85 and Survey of Private Schools 1985-86.

PERCENTAGE OF MINORITY PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS BY REGION, SCHOOL SIZE, AND TEACHING LEVEL

	Public School Teachers	Private School Teachers
All Teachers	13	8
Region		
Northeast	7	6
Midwest	9	4
South	21	11
West	12	12
School Size		
Less than 400	9	9
400 to 699	14	6
700 or larger	14	5
Teaching Level		
Elementary	15	9
Secondary	10	6

PERCENTAGES OF MINORITY PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS, BY AGE CATEGORY

	Under 30	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	Over 50
Private School Teachers	8	9	10	7	8	6
Public School Teachers	12	15	12	14	14	14

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (1988, October. Background and experience characteristics of public and private school teachers: 1984-85 and 1985-86, respectively. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

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